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SUBJECT: PYRAMID COLLAPSE BURYING THIRD TERM PROSPECTS?

REF: A. BOGOTA 2558
[B.](#) BOGOTA 4134
[C.](#) BOGOTA 4201
[D.](#) BOGOTA 4261
[E.](#) BOGOTA 4263

Summary

[¶](#)1. (SBU) The results of a recent Invamar-Gallup poll show Uribe maintains high public approval ratings in spite of a host of political and economic troubles. Still, public support for a third term has dropped from 74% to 54% since last July. In southern departments--areas hard-hit by the pyramid collapse--62% of respondents oppose a third term. Invamar-Gallup president Jorge Londono told us Uribe's remarkable popularity--while remaining positive--is likely to continue to slide in 2009 as the international economic crisis deepens. Uribe supporters continue to push to amend the Constitution to allow Uribe to run again, but Londono predicted that the pyramid scandal has definitely ended the possibility of a third Uribe term in 2010. End Summary.

Two Terms Sufficient, Thank You

[¶](#)2. (U) In a recent Invamar-Gallup poll, President Uribe maintains an enviable--though falling--approval rating. Seventy percent of the country approves his job performance, a drop from 86% after the daring Operation 'Jaque' last July, which rescued fifteen FARC hostages. Over his six years in office, Uribe has enjoyed an average popularity rating of 65%. Pundits call Uribe's steady approval rating in the face of political adversity--including the ongoing parapolitical scandal, the pyramid scheme collapse and the GOC's controversial intervention, extrajudicial killings by Colombian Armed Forces, and severe natural disasters--the "Teflon effect." Londono predicted that Uribe's approval ratings would remain positive, but would continue to slide as the international economic crisis deepens early next year.

[¶](#)3. (U) The Gallup poll also indicates that Uribe is losing support for a third term. A majority of the general public supports a 2010 reelection, but the number of supporters has dropped by 20%--falling from 74% to 54%--since the high point in July. The decline tracks with a public shift in focus to economic, rather than security, issues (Reftel A). When asked if the situation in Colombia is getting better or worse, the majority of respondents (58%) replied things are getting worse. The number of people who considered the situation in Colombia to be getting better dropped from 73% in July to 30%. These are the worst numbers registered during Uribe's six years as president.

[¶](#)4. (U) Londono noted that the GOC's handling of the recent

pyramid collapse--including allegations that Uribe's sons were connected to the companies involved and that these firms also helped collect signatures for the reelection effort--has exposed popular distrust of the banking sector and eroded public confidence in GOC institutions as well as Uribe. Many victims find GOC accusations of criminal activity against DMG founder Daniel Murcia less than convincing, noting that GOC agencies dealt with DMG for years before the intervention. Uribe felt compelled by the accusations against his children to hold a press conference to defend their integrity.

Southern Dis-Connection: Uribe Low in Public Opinion

¶5. (U) The poll shows respondents in the southern departments of Putumayo, Narino, and Cauca were hit hardest by the closing of DMG and have bleaker views of President Uribe. Only 45% approve of Uribe's job performance. Seventy-seven percent believe the situation in Colombia is getting worse. Seventy-three percent--16% more than in the country as a whole--believe Colombia's most important problem is the economy. The majority of southerners (54%) disagree with the GOC's decision to intervene in DMG. Fifty-one percent agreed with the statement that DMG had created an ingenious business model to help people. Protests against the GOC's decision to close DMG continued in Putumayo, with protesters chanting "no more Uribe, free Putumayo." An Uribe town meeting in Huila went badly, with the audience loudly protesting the GOC's actions.

¶6. (SBU) A majority of southerners (62%) oppose a second reelection. As a result of constituent protests, two Conservative Party coalition members from Narino and Putumayo--former supporters of a 2010 reelection--were forced to abstain on the November 9 third-term referendum vote in the First Commission. An editorial in the Bogota daily *El Tiempo* suggests that if the 2010 election were to make it to referendum, the estimated one million people who lost money in the pyramid schemes would join forces with the opposition to block a third term. Pro-Uribe supporters continue to push the reelection referendum in Congress, but Londono predicted that the pyramid scandal has definitively ended any possibility of a possible third Uribe term in 2010.

NICHOLS